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FOUR SAINTS BY FRA FILIPPO
LIPPI

A PICTURE of *Four Saints* by Fra Filippo Lippi was purchased by the Museum in 1917, and since August last has been hanging in Gallery 33. The painting was owned in Boston, where it had been deposited in the art museum of that city and kept in a storeroom. Here it was seen and recognized by Dr. Osvald Sirén in 1916. In an article in the *Boston Museum Bulletin*, vol. XIV, Dr. Sirén writes of some Italian pictures at the Museum which were not then on exhibition and comments at length on this painting.

"The most important picture among those which I had the pleasure of seeing in the storerooms of the Boston Museum," he writes, "is a large altar wing representing two kneeling and two standing saints, of which, however, one is almost gone. The picture is in a poor state of preservation, the paint beginning to peel off in parts; nevertheless its quality is so superior to any of the other pictures here discussed that even in its bad condition it appeals with the strong voice of a great master. There can be no doubt that this beautiful ruin is an authentic work by Fra Filippo Lippi. Sufficient reason for the attribution is offered by the masterly treatment of the mantle folds of the two kneeling saints and by the strong plastic quality of the figures, which stand out with the same kind of massive broadness as in Fra Filippo's best works of his mature period. The characterization of the youthful bishop and the old brooding friar with head inclined is equal to what we find in Fra Filippo's best works. Both have more or less portrait-like character and reveal a deep understanding of human temperaments. Of the two standing saints, one seems to have been Saint Francis; the other, wearing a bishop's mantle, who is better preserved, appears to be Saint Augustine.¹

¹The standing saints are St. Augustine at the left and St. Francis at the right; below, kneeling, are St. Louis of Toulouse at the left and St. Benedict at the right.

In spite of its ruinous state, the color, with its subdued grayish white and pinkish tones, is thoroughly characteristic of the master.

"This picture, which has been the right wing of a large altar panel, belongs evidently to Fra Filippo's middle period, about the time of the Prato frescoes. It might be compared to the large *Madonna and Saints* in the Louvre, or to the two wings, with standing Saints, in the Gallery at Turin. It would be interesting to know whether anything more has been preserved of the altarpiece of which this wing once formed a part. The only suggestion we have to offer is in regard to the predella. There is in the collection of the Princess of Oldenburg in Petrograd a small predella picture representing a scene from the life of Saint Augustine, which may have belonged to the same altarpiece as the present wing if we are right in calling the bishop Saint Augustine. It is also conceivable that the predella pictures which now are used as a footpiece to Fra Filippo's *Annunciation*, in S. Lorenzo, in Florence, and which represent scenes from the life of Saint Nicholas, originally formed part of the same altarpiece as the wing under discussion. At least they do not belong to the picture with which they now are combined, and they are works of the same period of Fra Filippo's activity as the Boston panel. Perhaps other parts of this altarpiece are still hidden at distant places; we have at present no possibility of making a close inquiry into this question."

Nothing need be added to Dr. Sirén's statement of the ascription of the picture or his surmises in regard to it. The injuries to the panel were caused by dampness and heat. The center of the panel, however, including the heads of Saint Louis and Saint Benedict and the surrounding parts, is in a good state of preservation. No finer example of the painting of its time than this fragment can be found in the Museum.

B. B.

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